



Keynote presentation - Joanne Keith, Department of Family and Child Ecology, MSU Education and opportunity in an interdependent world: Pre-college programs must extend beyond education to have an impact

Youth are the largest segment of our population, growing up in a world that is more global, integrated and complex than ever before. Faced with new opportunities and competition created by connectivity that spans borders, youth need skills for success in an increasingly interdependent world, says Joanne Keith of the Family and Child Ecology Department at MSU.

In youth development, too often we see employment as a goal, says Keith. The interdependence of the youth generation, however, increases the need to enable their success in health, education, forming families, citizenship, and employment.

These factors are significant in our current climate. As the U.S. endures economic hardship, enhancing our educational infrastructure and preparing youth is vital. Pre-college programs can fill an important role in building this infrastructure.

Varying levels of preparedness can be seen in an individual's transition from youth to adulthood, says Keith, citing some examples. Quentin, for instance, is eight-years old and just back from Egypt, able to experience a different culture and gain more understanding about his own world. Stephen, age 23, is another example. A participant in MSU pre-college programs, he earned his college degree and is now embarking on a very bright future working for NASA. This is in contrast to Paulus. At 16, he finds odd jobs to keep busy and earn money, all the while pondering whether or not he will drop out of And finally, there is Zang. As a refugee, Zang knows little English and is trying to assimilate to life in the U.S. He does not have a clear idea as to what he will do. In considering these four, pre-college programs may be more likely to seek out youth such as Quentin and Stephen. Giving an equal

level of opportunity to all requires pre-college specialists to take a risk on Paulus and Zang and others who might not normally get to college.

Meeting our obligation to all youth also means creating within them essential learning skills: initiative, innovation, leadership, assessment capabilities, and the six c's of competence – caring and compassion, character, competence, confidence, connection and contribution.

In a complex world, these skills lay a framework for development that goes beyond academic skills. They are key to what kids must know to succeed in a world with lower barriers to competition.

The first step in building strong programs is to teach kids about innovation and how to be innovative. A piece of this is engaging in rigorous assessment programs that lower the chance that youth will fail to participate in beneficial programs. It also helps pre-college programs understand what skills will be needed next. Creating this atmosphere requires experimentation and trying new approaches until one is found that prepares youth for the future.

A second step in building successful pre-college programs is providing opportunities. From birth, the availability and frequency of opportunities narrows as kids become older.

Opportunities become fewer as risk-taking is reduced or through thoughtless actions by youth, their parents and mentors. In this sense, while it may not take a village to raise a child, a village is influential. Our schools and peers are also pieces of this village, as are pre-college programs. For many, the pivotal experiences that shape their interests, ambitions and skills do not always occur in school - the "light" can go on in a variety of settings.

While expanding the diversity of opportunities is important, making room for more youth is paramount to our success. A metaphor is the concept of religious-based tithing. Some religions propose giving one-tenth of one's earnings. Pre-college programs might take a similar view, finding ways to include at least one out of 10 kids who are not always exposed to the benefits of their programs.

Sustaining relationships is a third step. Some programs may draw more youth than ever before, yet the timeframe for interacting with participants is much shorter. Comparatively, it has been shown that in some families as many as 22 adults interact within a family over the course of one year. Similarly, pre-college programs should focus on meaningful and sustained relationships. Like the real estate mantra -- "location, location, location" -- pre-college programs must echo the mantra, "relationship, relationship, relationship."

To embrace the role of pre-college programs and influence youth and enable their success through relationships, we must view ourselves as linked to individuals and groups in our communities. Fulfilling this role means finding adults and older youth who care about kids, can be mentors, and can build relationships.

Lastly, mentoring young people and maintaining pre-college programs in an increasingly dynamic world requires viewing youth as a project rather than viewing our discipline as the project. The project becomes changing the child or youth to enable their growth beyond our simply transferring knowledge. Connecting our communities, creating ways to develop skills that go beyond classroom learning, building and maintaining opportunities, and sustaining existing relationships and creating new ones are all keys to our success.

November 21, 2008

Michigan State University



Keynote presentation - Bryan Taylor, President and Founder, EduGuide

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Pre-college outreach specialists must take risks in difficult economic times to help young people fulfill their dreams of earning a college degree, said EduGuide President Bryan Taylor at the November 21, 2008, Pre-College Youth and Outreach Conference at Michigan State University.

Taylor shared lessons that could be applied from the entrepreneurial story of G.W. Haworth, best known for establishing the world-recognized Hayworth office furniture manufacturing company. Hayworth himself earned a degree during tough economic times and later supported programs to help other students.

Hayworth was a supporter of EduGuide, an award-winning Michigan-based nonprofit organization that gives strategies and tools to help pre-college outreach specialists engage families and youth in pursuing higher education goals.

G.W. himself benefited from another's sacrifices. As a young employee at a department store in Benton Harbor, G.W. received money from his boss to attend Western Michigan University. He earned a teaching degree, and returned home to teach shop class. Working after hours in his garage at home, G.W. also began what would become a global furniture empire.

Now deceased, Hayworth never forgot growing up during the Great Depression and that it was another's sacrifice that helped him fulfill his dreams. It is this recognition that led to Hayworth's support of EduGuide and belief in its mission.

Fulfillment of the pre-college mission comes during challenging economic times. Within Michigan, evidence of a recessionary period is clear. Pressure is being felt not only in personal expenditures, but also within outreach and engagement programs. It is during these uncertain times that leaders must make even greater sacrifices to push forward rather than pull back.

The environment created by economic hardship has also exposed the increasing relevance of education. Michigan has already made great progress on this front by implementing the recommendations of the Cherry Commission: To provide a statewide curriculum that leads to college, addressing dropout problems, and making college entrance exams free to all students. This has solidified Michigan's reputation as a leader in the college access movement.

Even with these successes, more must be done to forge pathways for youth. One goal is improving the connections between parents, students and pre-college outreach professionals. Critical to this relationship is the use of technology and electronic communication by outreach professionals.

Recent research conducted by EduGuide found that the number of parents using the Web and digital

and wireless technology is much higher than might be expected. Eighty percent of first generation parents (those who have not completed a college degree) are online and connected, using various forms of technology to communicate and gather new information. The rate of non-first generation adults using these technologies is 72 percent. The level of technology use increases further when teens are present in a household.

EduGuide's study also highlights outreach professionals' failure to take advantage of the digital medium. Many remain "digital immigrants," slow to adapt to the ways in which their constituents are communicating and gathering new information. For many, the digital world and finding new ways to build relationships is uncomfortable territory. Moving forward, therefore, raises the necessity for digital pioneers who combine offline and online strategies to encourage enrollment in college and university programs.

Working with educators and institutions of higher learning, EduGuide itself has redesigned its programs to provide more digital tools to reach families online. Efforts include a forum where parents, students and professionals can share advice and respond to questions. The forum can be found at <http://www.eduguide.org/Parents/Advice/tabid/180/Default.aspx>. EduGuide is also working on a new system that pre-college programs can use to manage college clubs for their students online.

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